Minuteman Group Is Reorganized

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By Jim Mann
Washington Post Staff Writer

A man who identified himself as the East Coast spokesman for the right-wing Minuteman organization called a press conference yesterday to announce that the paramilitary group has reorganized under new leadership.

George VanNess, 46, of Hyattsville, declared that the Minutemen will now be independent of their jailed former leader, Robert B. DePugh, and it will be an avowedly white supremacist organization.

VanNess said he would be the "liaison between the organization, which he said will remain "underground," and the public. Under DePugh, he said, the organization had been "too undercover."

The press conference was held at a ~~Hot Shoppes Restaurant~~ in the White Oak section of Montgomery County.

VanNess said he had invited the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Marine Corps to attend. But besides VanNess and two reporters, the only parties attracted to the press conference were two men, one of whom later identified himself to reporters as an FBI agent.

Unnoticed by VanNess, the two sat behind him at a nearby table in the restaurant, occasionally craning their necks in an apparent effort to overhear.

'Sort of a Shock'

Queried by a reporter after VanNess departed, one of the men acknowledged he was an FBI agent.

"It was sort of a shock to us. They've been inactive locally," the agent said.

"We found out about the conference from a UPI (United Press International) wire," the agent declared. He said that sitting nearby was "the only way we can provide coverage on short notice."

The purpose of the press conference apparently was to begin a new registration drive. VanNess admitted that "We need the publicity."

The avowed goal of the Minutemen, who model themselves on the Revolutionary War organization, is to prevent a communist take-over of the United States. VanNess said the group is preparing for "what has happened to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary."

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MINUTE, From B1

The group has formed paramilitary units, which go on occasional "maneuvers" and have been involved in a number of incidents, both comic and tragic, in recent years.

VanNess said that about 87 per cent of the Minutemen are ex-Marines who served in World War II. He claimed that the group possesses ammunition, two mobile field hospitals, four communications vehicles and a government-surplus IBM machine for an "intelligence network."

Paramilitary maneuvers, he said, take place "in the mountains."

The long-time Minuteman leader, DePugh, an industrialist from Norborne, Mo., was arrested by the FBI in July, 1969, and is serving a federal sentence for violations of the federal firearms act and bond default.

In his most recent annual report, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover said that the Minuteman activities have been "greatly reduced" since DePugh's arrest. He estimated the group's national membership at no more than 200 persons.

"Hoover has sold himself out to the Anti-Defamation League," VanNess claimed yesterday. The ADL is a group that combats anti-Semitism.

According to VanNess, about 100 Minutemen from throughout the country met in the Chicago area on Dec. 12 and 13 to reorganize the group.

A flyer with an Elgin, Ill., post office address, which VanNess gave to reporters yesterday, claims that DePugh is no longer capable of running the group.

GEORGE VANNESS
. . . Eastern spokesman